

## [Go ahead and read Numbers](#)

Every parent knows the shrill whine of a young child — a slow, high-pitched complaint that grates on the eardrums and aggravates the soul. The tone of voice is difficult to bear, but the real irritation is the underlying cause — discontentment and disobedience. As the “children” of Israel journeyed from the foot of Mount Sinai to the land of Canaan, they grumbled, whined, and complained at every turn. They focused on their present discomforts. Faith had fled, and they added an extra 40 years to their trip.

Numbers, which records the tragic story of Israel’s unbelief, should serve as a dramatic lesson for all of God’s people. God loves us and wants the very best for us. He can and should be trusted. Numbers also gives a clear portrayal of God’s patience. Again and again he withholds judgment and preserves the nation. But his patience must not be taken for granted. His judgment will come. We must obey.

As numbers begins, the nation of Israel was camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. The people had received God’s laws and were preparing to move. A census was taken to determine the number of men fit for military service. Next, the people were set apart for God. God was making the people, both spiritually and physically, ready to receive their inheritance.

But then the complaining began. First, the people complained about the food. Next, it was over Moses’ authority. God punished some people but spared the nation because of Moses’ prayers. The nation then arrived at Kadesh, and spies were sent into Canaan to assess its strength. Ten returned with fearful stories of giants. Only Caleb and Joshua encouraged the nation to “go at once to take the land” (13:30). The minority report fell on deaf ears full of the ominous message of the majority. Because of their unbelief, God declared that the present generation would not live to see the Promised Land. Thus the “wanderings” began. These wilderness wanderings featured a continuous pattern of grumbling, defiance, discipline, and seath. How much better it would have been to have trusted God and entered his land! Then the terrible waiting began — waiting for the old generation to die off and waiting to see if the new generation could faithfully obey God.

Numbers ends as it begins, with preparation. This new generation of Israelites was numbered and sanctified. After defeating numerous armies, they settled on the east side of the Jordan River. Then they faced their greatest test: to cross the river and possess the beautiful land God had promised to them.

The lesson is clear. God’s people must trust him, moving ahead by faith if they are to claim his promised land.